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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 000113

SIPDIS

FOR SRAP AMBASSADOR HOLBROOKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2020
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KG](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SRAP HOLBROOKE'S VISIT TO
KYRGYZSTAN

Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

11. (C) Embassy Bishkek welcomes the visit of Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard C. Holbrooke to Kyrgyzstan on February 19. Your visit comes at a timely period as the U.S.-Kyrgyzstan relationship has experienced positive momentum since the signing of the new agreement for the Transit Center at Manas International Airport. Your visit will provide an opportunity to express the U.S.'s appreciation for using the Transit Center and emphasize to the Kyrgyz the importance we place on our bilateral relationship, as well as brief on U.S. goals in Afghanistan.

U.S.-KYRGYZSTAN RELATIONSHIP

12. (C) Since the signing of the Transit Center agreement in the summer of 2009, the U.S.-Kyrgyzstan partnership has improved significantly as the Government of Kyrgyzstan moved closer to the U.S. In September, President Bakiyev made an extremely successful and public visit to the Transit Center to participate in a September 11th memorial service. Based on recent meetings with senior government officials, it appears that the Government of Kyrgyzstan is interested in working with the U.S. and building a closer relationship. At the same time, the Government of Kyrgyzstan is also actively reviewing the state of its relationships with its neighbors, Russia, and China, seeking a balance which would best serve its interests. The Kyrgyz government has been watching carefully President Obama's strategy in Afghanistan, especially the transfer of responsibility to the Afghan government in 2011, and a key concern of the government is what role the U.S. intends to play in Kyrgyzstan in the medium and long-term.

MANAS TRANSIT CENTER

13. (C) As the only U.S.-operated transit facility in Central Asia, the Manas Transit Center plays a critical role in transporting U.S. and coalition personnel and equipment as

part of President Obama's Afghanistan strategy. In 2009, the Transit Center served on average some 24,000 transiting Coalition forces and some 450 short tons of cargo per month. In January 2010, approximately 30,000 personnel and 600 short tons of cargo passed through the Transit Center, and it will likely remain at capacity over the next six months. The Transit Center also provides 30 percent of the air refueling over Afghanistan.

14. (C) The Transit Center Agreement requires that the U.S. notify Kyrgyzstan by April 14 if it intends to renew the agreement for another year. We have received no indication from the Kyrgyz that they are looking to renegotiate the agreement this year. However, it is clear to us that they are following very closely our compliance with its terms and with other commitments we have made, reviewing the benefits they derive from their cooperation with the U.S., and judging our long-term commitment to the region. If they decide their interests are not being served by the agreement as it stands, there is no doubt that they will reopen negotiations. The key issues in the Kyrgyz appraisal will likely be the \$15 million quarterly payment, the construction projects at the airport/Transit Center, the air traffic control project, the Economic Development Fund, levels of continuing U.S. assistance, implementation of joint security at the Transit Center, promised counternarcotics and counter-terrorism funding, and economic benefits from contracting from both the Transit Center and the Northern Distribution Network.

POLITICAL OVERVIEW

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15. (C) Since its independence nearly 18 years ago, Kyrgyzstan has been noteworthy for the relative openness of its political discourse and vibrancy of its civil society. Although still the leader in the region, Kyrgyzstan remains a fledgling democracy. It boasts a political opposition, an independent press that occasionally criticizes the government, and credible freedoms of religion, speech and assembly. However, recent trends find the government dialing back on these basic rights.

16. (C) In July 2009, President Bakiyev was re-elected as President in an election that many international observers characterized as flawed. Over the past several years, President Bakiyev has moved to consolidate political power and to divide and suppress the opposition. Opposition political parties face ongoing harassment, and the government actively uses criminal charges to threaten opposition leaders. In 2009, a number of opposition politicians and journalists were attacked and beaten, culminating in the death in Almaty, Kazakhstan, of Gennady Pavlyuk, a Kyrgyz journalist. To date, Kyrgyz and Kazakh authorities have not made any arrests in the Pavlyuk case.

ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

17. (C) Under Bakiyev, state budget expenditures -- including salaries and pensions -- have grown steadily, but poverty remains widespread. In 2009, Kyrgyzstan benefited from significantly increased financial support from the international financial institutions and other donors. In addition, the Russian government has provided a \$150 million grant and a \$300 million low-interest loan to the Kyrgyz government in 2009. With much of its financial system isolated from global markets, Kyrgyzstan weathered the effects of the global economic downturn relatively well. The economic slowdown in Russia and Kazakhstan, however, severely reduced the amount of remittances Kyrgyz workers sent home. Kyrgyz workers abroad send home an estimated \$1 billion, or 20-25% of Kyrgyzstan's GDP, annually. (Russia and Kazakhstan provide jobs for nearly 1 million Kyrgyz workers, or over one third of the workforce.) In addition, pervasive corruption

at all levels of government is a barrier to economic development, effective service provision, and foreign investment.

BORDER ISSUES

18. (C) The absence of demarcated and delineated borders between Kyrgyzstan and its Tajik and Uzbek neighbors has fueled occasional clashes between residents and each government's border services. In addition, the government is hyper-sensitive to the threat of Islamic separatism in the South. In May 2009, IMU/IJU militants launched attacks on Uzbek security facilities on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, and an additional militant blew himself up outside a police station in Andijon, Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government claimed that these attacks were launched from Kyrgyz soil. In June, Kyrgyz security forces located and clashed with IMU/IJU militants linked to the May attacks in Uzbekistan in various villages in southern Kyrgyzstan, resulting in the deaths of nine militants and one police officer.

U.S. ASSISTANCE

19. (C) The U.S. has a range of active bilateral assistance programs, including IMET, FMF, EXBS, and INL. USAID is providing over \$20 million in assistance to Kyrgyzstan, with programs in economic growth, health care, education, and

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democracy and governance. The Kyrgyz government, however, is deeply suspicious of some democracy programming, believing that the U.S. uses these programs to fund the political opposition, destabilize the country, and foster "color revolutions." Government hardliners complain about the National Democratic Institute and other democracy implementers as being biased against the government and interfering with domestic politics.

MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT

110. (C) During your meeting with President Bakiyev, he is certain to raise his "Bishkek Initiative," a proposal to host an international conference on security and stability in the Central Asia region, including Afghanistan, for which he will be seeking U.S. support. At the Turkey conference on Afghanistan in January, Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Sarbayev gave Deputy SRAP Paul Jones a non-paper detailing the "Bishkek Initiative." Your expression of interest in at least hearing more details about how the Kyrgyz envision this initiative will please Bakiyev.

GFOELLER